

# **10 PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY**

## **Overview**

Accountability is the backbone of a successful educational system. In Washington, higher education is decentralized but, to reach state goals, all of higher education must work together. By redesigning the state's higher education accountability system, the state can identify and address the strengths and weaknesses at the institution, sector, and state levels to better promote student success.

It is fairly easy to measure progress toward the Higher Education Coordinating Board's two strategic master plan goals of (1) increasing opportunities for students to earn degrees and (2) responding to the state's economic needs. However, in addition to meeting these goals, the state and the colleges and universities must ensure that each student is served equitably, each student is able to complete his or her education efficiently, and the end result is effective. These concepts are far more difficult to quantify and each college or university may adopt different policies and strategies based on its unique student population. Nevertheless, a strong accountability system must ensure that efficiency, equity, and effectiveness are defined in measurable terms and that statewide and institutional policies are created, modified, or discontinued based on an analysis of accountability results.

Currently, the purpose of higher education accountability is unclear and its performance indicators have little relation to institutional or state goals. The National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy underscored the need for a new state accountability system in Washington, stating in a recent policy audit, "Accountability is not systematically used to help focus institutional attention on a limited number of state priorities."

The board has begun to redesign Washington's accountability system based on the following principles:

- Priorities of Washington colleges and universities are aligned with state goals as defined in legislation and the 2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education;
- Targets are set for the state and each college and university;
- Annual reports detail both significant achievements and areas to strengthen for the state and each college and university; and
- Based on accountability data, statewide and institutional policies are developed to help students succeed in completing their education efficiently, equitably, and effectively.

## ***Analysis***

The board's proposal to redesign accountability is consistent with a number of current initiatives, including the work of the National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy, the governor's Priorities of Government, and House Bill 3103. House Bill 3103, enacted into law in 2004, directed the board to "establish an accountability monitoring and reporting system as part of a continuing effort to make meaningful and substantial progress towards the achievement of long-term performance goals in higher education."<sup>1</sup>

The board believes the revised accountability system must be comprehensive enough to evaluate student progress and success, while remaining flexible enough to reflect changing state priorities. The board also believes that representatives from Washington's colleges and universities must actively participate in developing the new system if it is to have an impact on improving student performance.

## ***Implementation Plan***

### ***1. Develop and implement a higher education accountability model that measures progress toward statewide goals.***

***During winter 2005, HECB staff*** and a work group of representatives from the public four-year colleges and universities will continue developing a set of common and institution-specific measures and targets and will review them with stakeholders. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) will recommend measures and targets for the two-year college system that reflect the role and mission of the colleges.

***During spring 2005, the HECB*** will review and adopt the new accountability model and biennial performance targets for the public two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

***By November 2005 and annually thereafter,*** the individual four-year colleges and universities and the SBCTC on behalf of the two-year system will submit data to the HECB using the new measures and biennial plans to achieve improvements.

***By September of each even-numbered year,*** in synch with the budget cycle, the HECB will submit biennial plans and targets to the legislature and governor.

<sup>1</sup> Substitute House Bill 3103, Sec. 11, as signed into law.

### ***Performance measures***

- Alignment of institutional measures and performance targets with state goals and core values outlined in the master plan.

### ***Estimated costs***

The HECB and colleges and universities will absorb all costs, as they have for several past biennia.

### ***Examples of ongoing related work***

- Since 1997, Washington's higher education accountability system for the four-year colleges and universities has included a total of six measures: four measures common to each institution (student retention, graduation efficiency for students who enroll as freshmen and for those who transfer, and five-year graduation rate), one measure for faculty productivity defined differently by each institution, and one institution-specific measure. In the past, the two-year college system has reported on three common measures: transfer-readiness, adult literacy, and preparation for work.
- In 2003, the National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy conducted a policy audit in Washington and found that "accountability is not systematically used to help focus attention on a limited number of state priorities."
- In February 2004, a work group with representatives from the public four-year and two-year colleges and universities was formed at the request of the HECB to help develop a new higher education accountability model.
- House Bill 3103, effective June 2004, directed the HECB to establish an accountability monitoring and reporting system as part of a continuing effort to make meaningful, substantial progress toward the achievement of long-term performance goals in higher education.
- In September 2004, the accountability work group agreed that a new accountability model should include accountability measures for institutions, the state, and the statewide higher education system. Each public four-year college submitted proposed common and institution-specific measures, and the SBCTC redefined two of the three existing measures for the community and technical colleges.
- The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges collects and reports remediation enrollments for the state's two-year colleges. Washington State University's Graduate Follow-Up Study provides remediation information about students at the state's four-year colleges.

